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ABSTRACT

This paper examines why experienced administrators are electing not to join educational-administration applicant pools. Research reports that more teachers than ever are pursuing administrative courses and more individuals than ever are administratively certified. However, greater numbers of vacancies for jobs in educational administration exist or will exist than in the past. Additionally, the job has so many rigorous constraints that few people aspire to the position. This report focuses on whether there are gender differences related to the reasons administrators do not pursue other positions, and, if so, it explores the reasons men and women identify for these differences. The study entailed a 15-item survey to collect data from a sample of public-school administrators from New York State. The survey included questions about the respondents' age, gender, and length of time as certified administrators, as well as type and size of districts in which the respondents were employed. The remaining questions sought to determine if the respondents had ever decided against applying for an administrative position and to elicit information about the reasons for their decisions. Findings show that some of the reasons qualified administrators did not apply were lack of experience, relocation, inadequate compensation, district problems, stress, and time demands. Contains 26 references. (RJM)

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Where are the School Leaders for the New Millennium? A Study of Reasons Cited by Incumbent Administrators Who have Decided not to Apply for Another Administrative Position

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New York State Education Department records identify the large numbers of individuals who currently possess administrative certification (NYS Education Department, 1997). And yet, recent statewide studies (New Visions for Public Schools, 1999; O'Connell, 1995) reported that administrative applicant pools lack an adequate number of quality applicants for the principalship and the superintendency. It appears that many more individuals are certified than are applying for administrative positions. The same state records also show that while women represented 66% of those earning administrative certification, they represented 48% of the elementary principals, 25% of the secondary principals and 15% of the superintendents. Are women underrepresented because of biases in the selection process or are they also choosing not to apply for vacant administrative positions? Given the report of a rising retirement rate (Volp, F.D., Archambault, P., Barretta, A., Service, R., Terranova, M., & Whitehill, W.E., 1998), it is imperative that we understand why certified and experienced administrators are electing not to become part of the applicant pool. This study sought to explore this question by asking current administrators to explain the reasons for their reluctance to seek the next career ladder administrative position.

Theoretical Framework

"Changes in demographics, state legislation, and the attitudes of young colleagues are fueling what could become an exodus from school leadership positions" (McComick, 1987, p. 2). The administrative position appeals to fewer aspiring administrators since it is increasingly viewed as a burnout position, particularly the role of high school principal (Gmelch, 1994). Yerkes and Guaglianone (1998) found that the job of high school principal must be redefined if it is going to attract good candidates. Mackler (1996) described some of the challenges facing potential principals including role definition, power and authority to do the job, work relationships, and the

recognition of the job. Unless these issues are addressed, fewer individuals will seek administrative positions. "Principals are sandwiched between higher authorities and boards of education on the one hand and multiple constituencies on the other" (Terrill, 1993, p. 89). Another study reported that increasing demands from parents, teachers, students and departments of education created significant stress levels which reduced potential effectiveness (Borg & Riding, 1993).

While the current research effort was focused on the status of potential administrative applicants in New York State, the problem is actually part of a growing national trend. The shortage of administrative candidates was recently highlighted in Education Week (Houston, p. 44, 1998). The commentary described a study conducted by the Educational Research Service for the National Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals that revealed administrative shortages in urban and rural areas. However, the study concluded that the shortage is not unique to those areas. Houston (1998) stated that "it is a problem across the board in all kinds of schools and districts".

A number of studies have documented significant levels of administrative vacancies throughout the nation (Barker, 1996; Jordan, McCauley, & Comeaux, 1994; Price, 1994; Silky & Dudley 1997; Wendel et al, 1994). The combination of administrative candidate shortages and administrative vacancies creates a potential crisis in educational leadership in this country. For example, schools in southwestern Louisiana anticipated fifty-three vacant positions by the 1997 school year with a pool of only 100 certified and interested applicants (Jordan et al, 1994). Price (1994) reported nearly one third of administrators throughout the state of Wisconsin intended to leave by 1997, potentially creating 250 new positions in each of three years.

Some New York state rural regions anticipated "70% of the superintendents, 50% assistant superintendents, 46% principals and 40% assistant principals will be eligible to retire within the next four years" (Silky & Dudley, 1997). In another study, Nebraska reported 52% of school superintendents intended to retire within the next 10 years (Wendel et al, 1994). Yee and Cuban (1996) reported a survey by the Council of Great City Schools found 42 of 47 urban districts hired new superintendents since 1990. These studies show that this problem is prevalent throughout the nation; it is not unique to one state or region.

Bowles (1990) described the aging of current administrators leaving the administrative ranks within the next five years. He calls this issue the silent crisis since public perception suggests that administrative positions attract "long lines of qualified administrators" (p.12). However, these qualified and interested candidates are not stepping forward to fill the vacancies (O'Connell, 1995).

Given these potential vacancies, it is reasonable to ask whether a sufficient number of individuals are being certified as educational administrators. In 1995, 1,810 administrative certificates were issued in New York State (NYS Education Department, 1997). If teachers are becoming administratively certified, why aren't they entering administrative ranks? Attempts to discern ways to fill administrative vacancies are imperative. A first step in the process is to determine reasons for the reluctance to enter or move into administrative positions. Studies have shown several potential reasons for this unwillingness (Dlugosh, 1994; Keller, 1998). Keller (1998) stated that a telephone survey revealed the prime reason discouraging candidates was too little pay for the responsibilities. Secondary reasons included increased stress and work hours. Yerkes and Guaglianone's (1998) survey indicated additional reasons including difficulty in helping teachers become more collaborative, increasing societal demands and social problems, and

a negative view of the assistant principalship as an administrative position. Repa (1996) surveyed recent graduates of educational administration programs. He found those who did not seek administrative positions cited concerns with job security, loss of tenure, and loss of direct student contact among the reasons to remain in the teaching ranks. According to O'Connell (1997), search consultants indicated that few incentives enticed individuals to move to the superintendency. There is more criticism of leaders in society, and the demands and the complexity of the job are increasing (Lazaroff, 1999).

This topic concerns current administrators and the public as evidenced by a recent editorial. Robert Loretan, the Executive Director of the New York State Council of School Superintendents, responded to an editorial in the Schenectady Gazette, Schenectady, New York (1998). He stated it was difficult to lure tenured principals to the superintendency due to increased work responsibilities coupled with a minor salary adjustment. Additionally, superintendents face school board disharmony and a poor public perception of education.

Overall, the numbers of administratively certified teachers have increased, especially concerning women. Morie and Wilson (1996) found that women outnumber men in educational administration programs, yet women are not pursuing administrative positions. In 1997, the New York State Education department reported that 66% of all administrative certificates were issued to women. If more women than ever are becoming administratively certified, why aren't they entering administrative positions in greater numbers? Morie and Wilson (1996) determined several factors influencing women's decisions not to enter administration, particularly the superintendency. Factors included having others defining the role as a "man's" job particularly on the part of the board, lack of political expertise, difficulty entering the administrative position, especially for the first position. Women felt they had to be more qualified than males and needed

to balance personal and professional responsibilities. Sometimes women did elect to take a superintendency. However, many women voluntarily left it to pursue personal and professional life balance including child-rearing concerns. In some cases, they moved to central office positions in a more instructional capacity (Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993).

Basically, research reports that more teachers than ever are pursuing administrative courses and more individuals than ever are administratively certified. However, greater numbers of vacancies exist or will exist than in the past. Additionally, the job has become complex with so many rigorous constraints that few people aspire to the position. This study is an attempt to determine if there are gender differences related to the reasons why administrators do not pursue other positions in administration. If so, what are some of the reasons men and women identify for these differences.

Methodology and Instrumentation

The researchers developed a fifteen-item survey to collect data from a sample of public school administrators from across New York State. The sample excluded New York City since separate rules govern the licensing and selection of administrators within the city. The survey instrument included questions about the respondent's age, gender, and length of time as a certified administrator as well as type and size of districts in which the respondents were employed. The remaining questions sought to determine if the respondents had ever decided against applying for an administrative position and to elicit information about the reasons for their decisions. The instrument was field tested with 25 administrators who reviewed the survey for question clarity. These individuals were excluded from the study. Feedback from the pilot test group was used to revise and refine the instrument prior to use with the full sample.

A total of 945 administrators from across New York State were selected through a systematic random process. Rural, urban and suburban schools were represented in the selection, as were schools of varying size. The sample was similar to the state's population (excluding New York City) on several key variables; gender, age, district type, and district size as measured by total student enrollment (Figures 1 - 4). Chi square analyses revealed no significant differences between male and female respondents on age, district type or district size. The researchers received 691 completed surveys for a response rate of 73%.

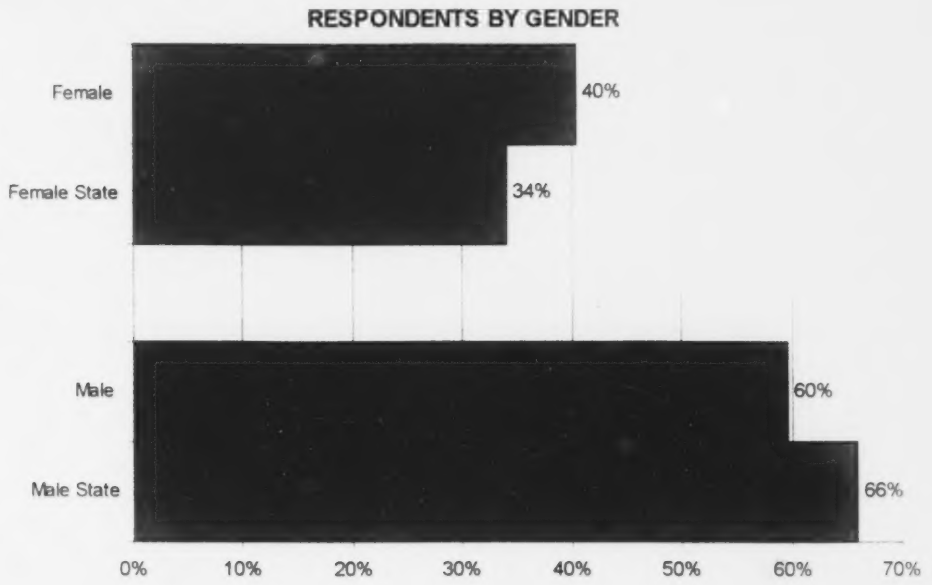

Figure 1

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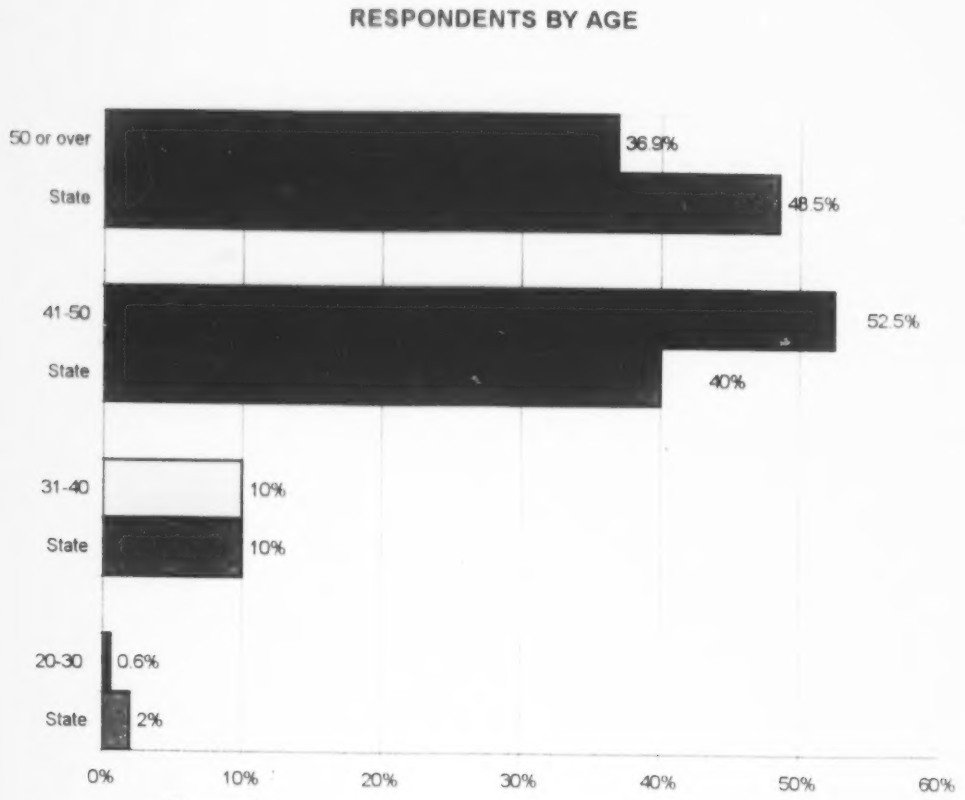

Figure 2

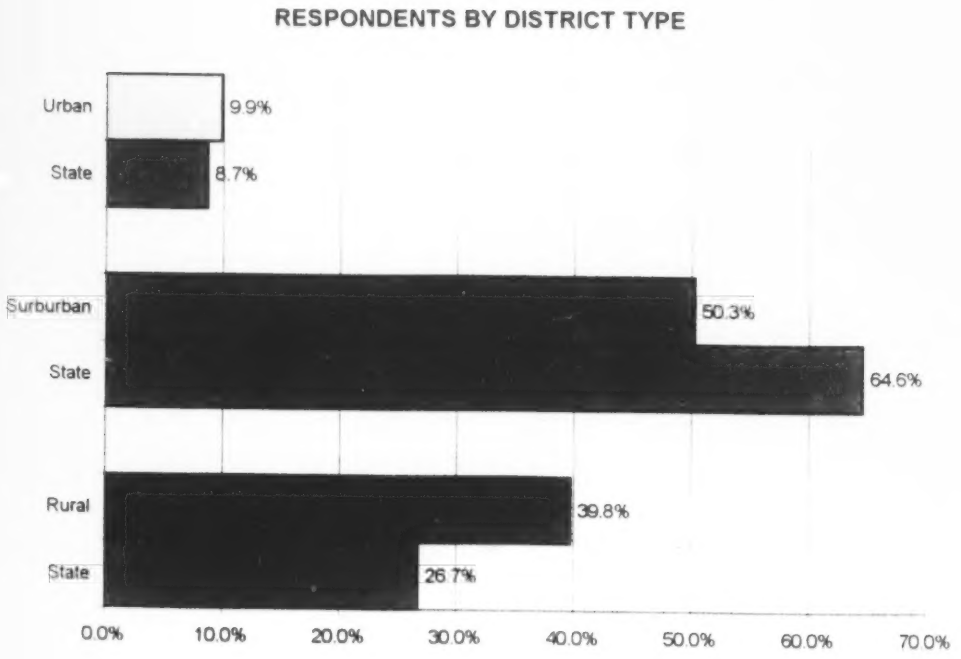

Figure 3

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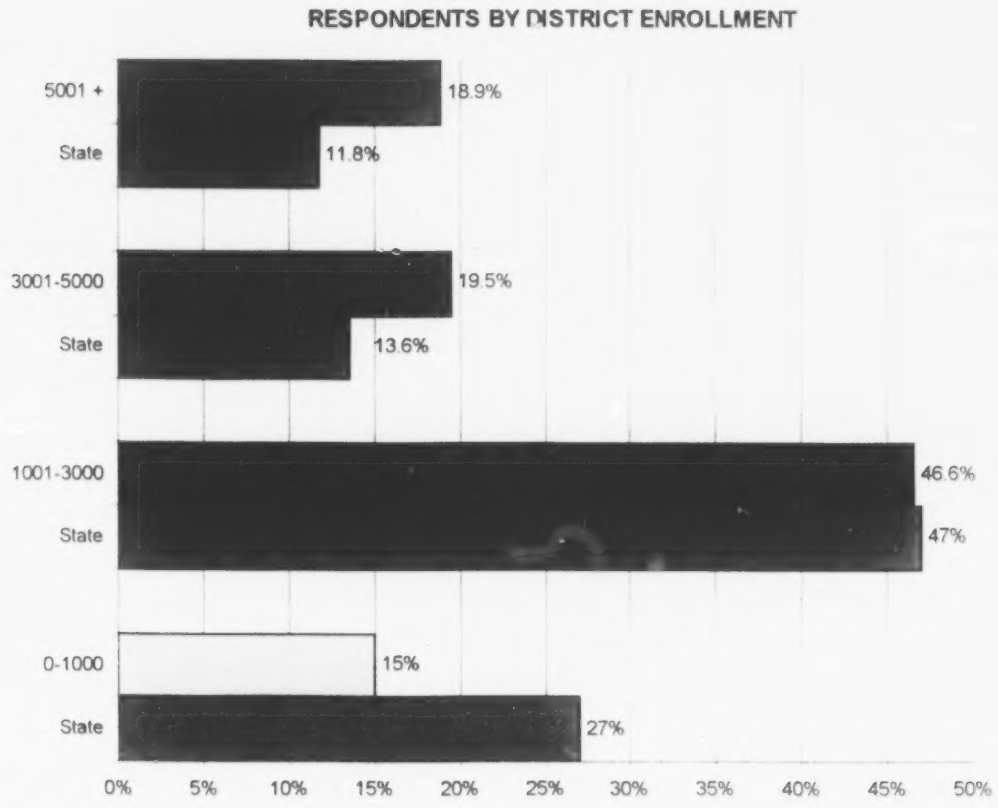

Figure 4

The sample also represented a diverse range of administrative positions. A total of 75 assistant middle or high school, 258 elementary, 122 middle or junior high, and 115 high school principals responded. In addition, seven subject area supervisors, and 114 central office personnel, including superintendents, answered the questionnaire.

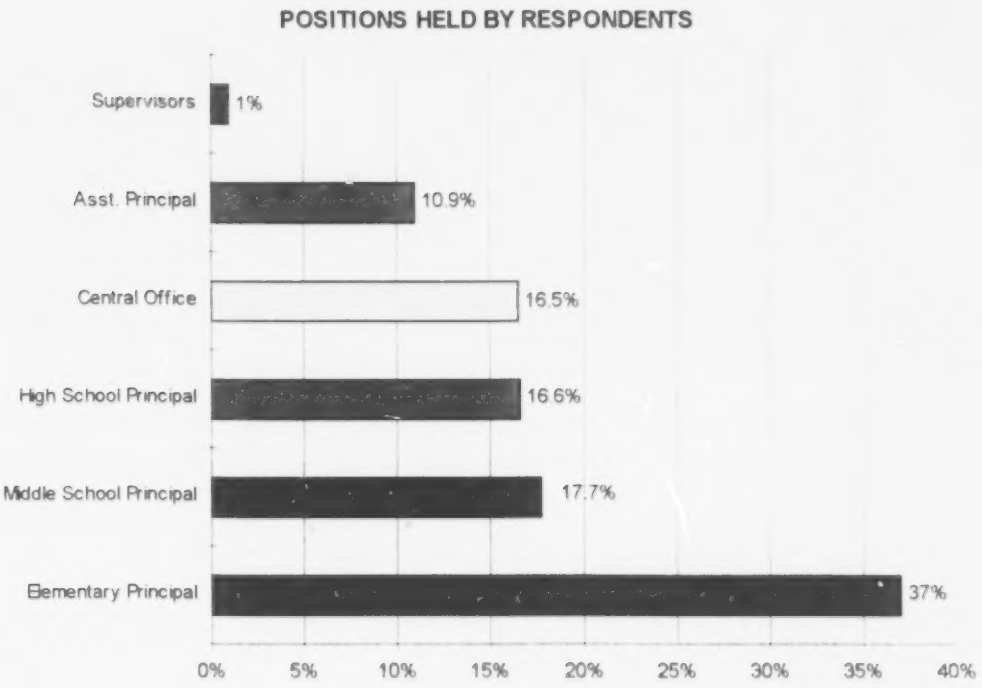

Figure 5

Results and Discussion

Over their careers, 38.4 % of this sample of administrators applied for 3-5 administrative positions, 31.4 % applied for 2 or fewer positions, 15.6 % for 10 or more positions and 14.6 for 6-9 positions. As a group they have been active applicants and therefore are an important group to study (Figure 6)

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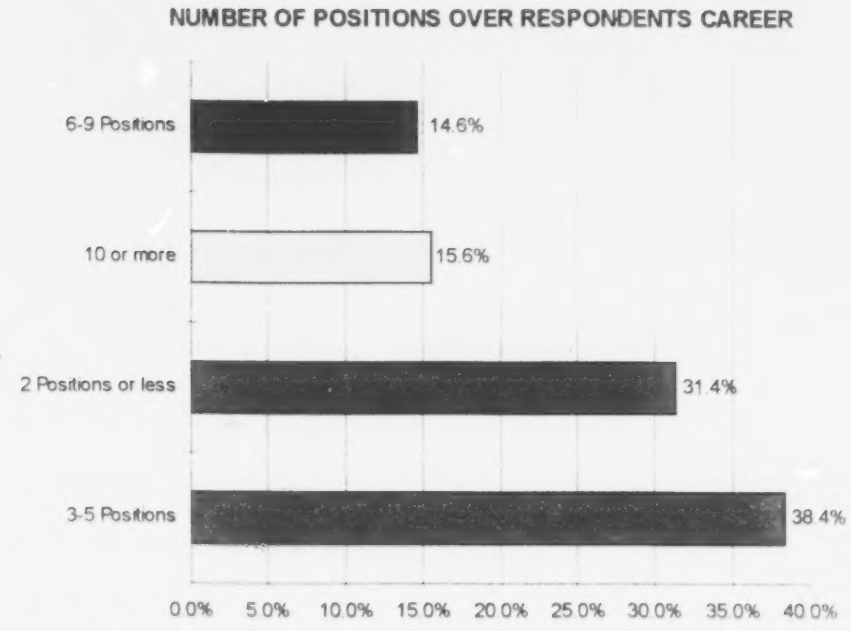

Figure 6

When asked if they had ever decided against applying for an administrative position because they felt they would not be a viable candidate, 39.2% reported in the affirmative (Figure 7). While a higher percentage of males (42.1) reported making this decision than females (34.8), the difference was not statistically significant.

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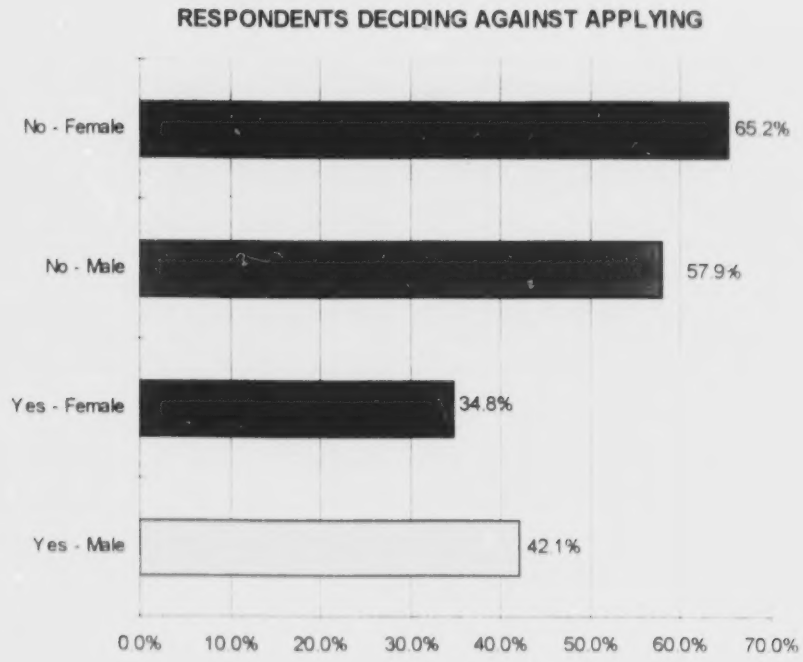

X^2 is not statistically significant

Figure 7

Respondents were then asked to indicate the reason or reasons they felt they would not be viable as an applicant. Unlike much of the earlier research cited in the literature, the most frequently cited reason was a lack of experience. Nearly half (46.9%) felt they were unprepared for the next position. In fact, one respondent indicated "few opportunities to grow and stretch professionally. There haven't been any programs to "grow" staff for higher level positions within the district or for outside opportunities." Another response revealed that few elementary assistant principalships are available as a position in which to gain experience.

As one person indicated, few can afford to leave teaching for a year to intern with little or no monetary compensation. However, several individuals cited experience on the job as a necessary

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prerequisite to their current position. One respondent stated, "until I spent 3 years as an assistant to the Principal, a position that gave me administrative experience, while I stayed in the teachers' bargaining unit, my resume received little attention". One elementary principal said she loved her job, but believed the positions she held first, department chair and assistant principal, greatly assisted in her current administrative position.

Whether accurate or simply the administrators' perceptions of their own 'readiness'; this single reason removed 18% of them from the active applicant pool. Given the large number of anticipated retirements, this concern may increase as administrative vacancies proliferate and less experienced administrators are hired to fill them. The remaining reasons (Figure 8) were similar to those cited in other research studies; relocation, inadequate compensation, district problems, stress and time demands

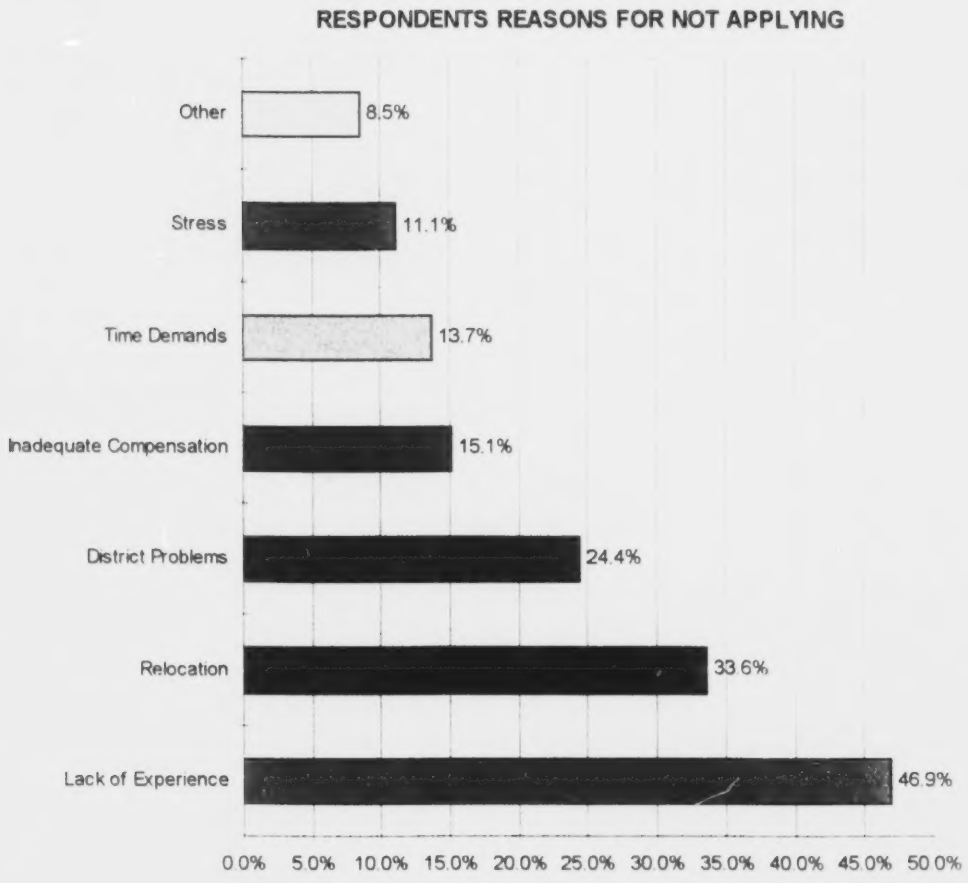

Figure 8

The respondents were also asked to identify the **primary** reason for their decision not to apply. Lack of experience was reported most frequently (46.9%), followed by relocation (21.6%), inadequate compensation (13.4%), district problems (8.8%), stress (5.7%), and time demands (3.6%). One respondent identified almost all of these reasons in this statement "volume of work, lack of adequate compensation, stress, high paid teachers, all work against being an administrator."

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When asked if they had ever decided not to apply because they feared discrimination based on age, gender or race, 11.3% of the sample responded in the affirmative. Most (52.6%) identified concern about their age. One respondent said, "Taking an administrative position at 51 impacts my benefits. At this point, I have built up a sick leave bank of over 75% of my salary when I retire. I have worked for this district for 26+ years. For me to leave at my age, the salary questions loom large". More males (65.8%) cited this concern than did females (40.0%).

Gender was identified by 25.6% as the basis of a decision not to apply. When desegregated, some important differences are found between males and females. Nearly 42.5% of the women said they chose not to apply for a position because of concerns about gender discrimination whereas only 7.9% of the males cited this reason. A respondent indicated that "some districts make it clear through their actions, that they prefer male administrators". One administrator felt that many districts actively practice discrimination once on the job. However, women cited difficulties even attaining their first administrative post. "When I completed my administrative certification, it was difficult for women to get a position. I was always the token woman finalist," was the response of one woman.

Race and religion were also identified by a number of potential applicants as the reasons discouraging them from applying. Figure 9 shows the percentage of those citing a discriminatory reason and the results of a chi square analysis, (reason by gender).

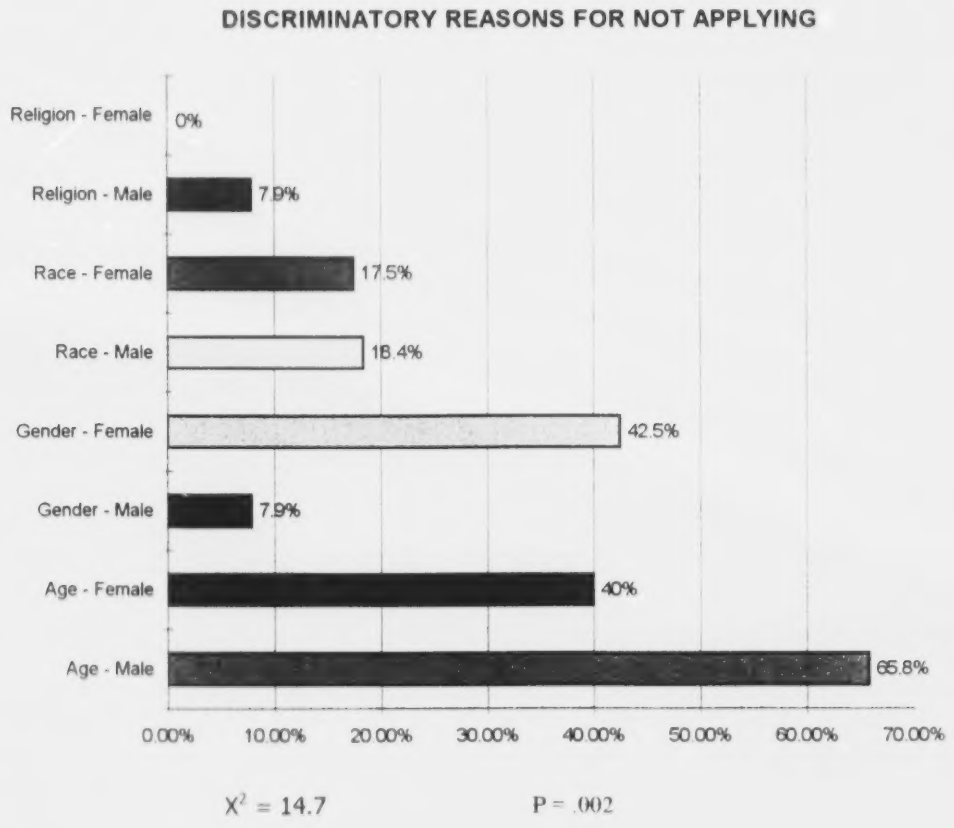

Figure 9

Finally, the respondents were asked if they had ever declined a position after it had been offered. The data showed that 18.5% of the sample had at some point declined an administrative position. The most frequently cited reasons confirm the results of earlier studies from the literature (Figure 10).

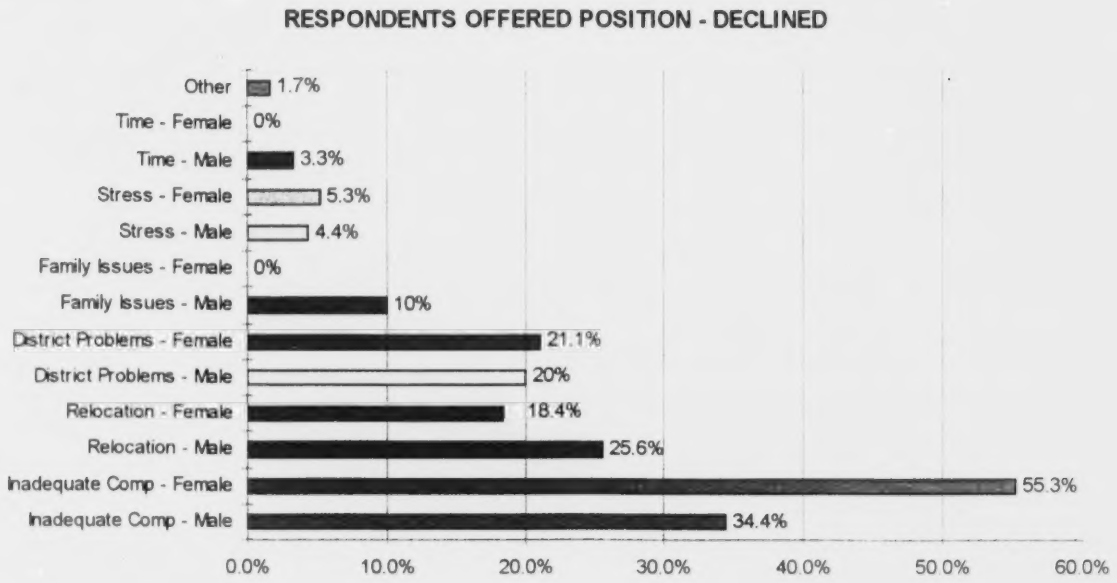

Figure 10

While females (55.3%) identified inadequate compensation more frequently than males (34.4%) and males (18.4%) cited relocation issues more often than females (25.6%), chi square analysis indicated that these differences were not statistically significant.

Respondents were particularly vocal in the category of compensation. One person expressed the concerns of many when he said, "I made more as a teacher, coach, and housepainter than an administrator with a lot less stress". Most comments reflected issues related to salaries relative to the amount of time and responsibility of the positions. Surveys stated that "administrative salaries do not keep pace with teaching salaries; I have 2 teachers making more than me as a building principal".

Certainly, compensation is a significant factor in declining pools. Yet, comments related to relocation and family issues showed concerns about uprooting families for a higher level administrative position. A respondent expressed concerns that "many positions available do not

earn tenure status and require relocating. The political nature of such positions places an unrealistic strain on the family. Unless the field of administration becomes more respectful and appreciative of family responsibility and hours, there will be fewer and fewer interested candidates".

District problems, especially boards of education, are cited as reasons for administrators' declining other positions. Comments ranged from the general attitude of the board to one statement that read "currently the BOE make it extremely difficult to work. My BOE does not follow policy, procedure, etc. Let me out!"

An elementary school principal found that the greatest stressor was not the job, but the school board. She said, "negative agendas, power plays and the mean spirited BOE nature emphasize the need for BOE training".

Conclusions and Implications for Future Research

Based on the age information gathered from the survey, 88% of the current administrators are eligible to retire within the next 10 years. Of that amount, 36.9% can retire immediately or within the next 5 years. Couple that with the dwindling pool of administrators and a potential shortage emerges in New York State.

This study highlights the concerns related to the shortage by differentiating the findings according to gender and reasons current administrators cited for not applying or declining a position. Given these findings, gender issues and the over riding concerns related to the diminishing applicant pool need to be addressed.

Previously, administrators followed a typical path to the central office positions. Often a department chairperson led to an assistant principalship, principalship, assistant superintendency and finally the superintendency. Today, administrators, reluctant to move within the administrative ranks, aren't pursuing higher level positions. Due to this trend, we see a limited number of applicants for upper level administrative positions.

The statistical significance between gender and the discriminatory reasons for not applying supports the need to encourage women in administration Real or perceived bias in the selection process should be addressed. Encouraging women through mentoring, job shadowing, or "bridge" leaves, allows women the opportunity to try the positions under more controlled circumstances without the loss of tenure. Providing a successful experience for women may encourage districts to hire qualified and experienced females.

Board of education members must recognize the demands of the job and be more realistic when determining salary ranges. They need to recognize that men and women may not be able to relocate to the district to take a superintendency. Eliminating the residency requirement may result in increased applicants.

Legislation targeting money for tuition reimbursement encourages individuals to enter and remain in administration. Additionally, adding retirement benefits due to an increased work day and work year address some of the monetary issues identified by the respondents.

Conducting further study with administratively certified teachers may provide answers to remaining questions related to administrative applicant pools. Perhaps this population can shed some light on the administrative pipeline problem. Additionally, administrative experience as a predictor of future administrative success is another avenue to explore. These suggestions won't solve the problem, but they may help find and retain future administrative leaders.

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